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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000797

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER MELES PRESSES ON HIGH LEVEL SENIOR  
MEETINGS AS CRITICAL TO THE HEALTH OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: A. ADDIS 578

[1](#)B. ADDIS 459

[1](#)C. ADDIS 594 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (S/NF) After a brief meeting with Senator Inhofe and his delegation on April 7 (septel), Prime Minister Meles took Ambassador to the side and privately raised three issues: 1) the need to "improve" the State Department Human Rights Report (HRR), which he felt was filled with errors; 2) allegations that the U.S. Embassy leaked Ethiopia's draft counterterrorism law to Human Rights Watch (HRW); and 3) the need for senior-level bilateral meetings to resolve misunderstandings and enhance U.S.-Ethiopia relations. For his part, the Ambassador again raised U.S. objections to the Ethiopian Government's (GoE) re-arrest and pardon revocation of opposition leader Birtukan Midekssa. Meles replied emphatically that Birtukan's case is a criminal justice case that GoE leadership cannot get involved in. End Summary.

#### THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Meles requested that the U.S. Embassy discuss with the Foreign Ministry any and all allegations of human rights abuses throughout the year -- and certainly prior to the issuance of the annual HRR -- to ensure accuracy and, if there are problems, to allow the government to investigate and correct such abuses. Meles argued that much of the HRR is inaccurate with the United States covering its own failure to credibly investigate allegations by couching reports in language such as "alleged," "it appears that," "based on unverified reports." "The HRR hurts relations," the Prime Minister said, and he asked for the Embassy and MFA to go over this year's HR report and to hear the MFA's analysis of the report. Meles concluded that the vast majority of the HRR is misleading, inaccurate and draws the wrong conclusions. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. does not review the HRR with host governments prior to its issuance and normally does not discuss the content of the report, even as it is developed during the year, with the host nation. We can begin to consult the MFA on cases of concern and will review issues with the MFA.

#### THE DRAFT COUNTERTERRORISM LAW

[1](#)3. (S/NF) The Prime Minister was concerned over the draft

counterterrorism law being leaked to Human Rights Watch, which drafted a scathing analysis of the draft law. The Prime Minister said it was a draft and still under debate. He said his officials told him that only the U.S. and U.K. were provided copies of the draft law and it was believed that the U.S. leaked the report to HRW. The Ambassador said he would investigate and get back to the Prime Minister, but assured that any information passed to the U.S. in confidence would be kept in confidence. (Note: We did share the text of the draft law with Washington agencies as well as with some other embassies in Ethiopia. End Note.)

#### SENIOR BILATERAL MEETINGS

14. (S/NF) The Prime Minister again requested senior level bilateral meetings to resolve misunderstandings and promote as well as improve bilateral relations (Refs A and B). Meles said he felt there was far too much anxiety on the Ethiopian side on the state of relations and direction of relations, and noted that bilateral relations were facing severe challenges which must be met, otherwise relations could sour and become contentious.

#### BIRTUKAN

15. (S/NF) The Ambassador raised the case of jailed opposition leader Birtukan Midekssa (Ref C) with the Prime Minister, repeating Washington's objection to her re-arrest and pardon revocation. Meles replied that Birtukan's is a criminal

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justice case and that it is a legal issue which he and his government cannot and will not get involved in. It is now with the justice system and it is the system which will determine her legal fate and treatment. He added that he will not, and cannot, release Birtukan yet again. Her release in July 2007 was her opportunity to start a new life.

As he told Senator Inhofe earlier, Birtukan decided to politicize her pardon in 2007. Meles cut off discussion of the matter before the Ambassador could 1) request her release from solitary confinement, 2) protest plans to move her from Kaliti prison near the capital to Ziway prison three hours south of Addis, or 3) request USG or ICRC access to assess her condition.

#### COMMENT

16. (S/NF) Post is ready and willing to review the 2008 Human Rights Report with the Foreign Ministry as well as to relay specific and credibly allegations of human rights abuses with the MFA throughout the year as long as doing so does not pose further risk to victims. While we have no intention of pre-vetting future HRRs with the GoE prior to their release, raising specific cases could give the GoE the opportunity to show if/how seriously it investigates such claims and holds individuals accountable. While we do raise human rights issues, such as alleged abuses in the volatile Ogaden region, with the leadership regularly, this proposed approach would be more formalized and allow us to raise cases at a greater level of specificity. Our openness to such consultations would also allow us to put more pressure on the GoE to allow our human rights outreach visits throughout the country to go unimpeded.

17. (S/NF) Meles' increasingly aggressive responses to pro forma USG actions (such as the HRR, language in the 2007 appropriations bill, etc.) in recent months almost certainly stems from GoE anxiety over how the Obama Administration may engage Ethiopia. At the same time, the Prime Minister's obstinacy on cases like Birtukan's, the CSO law, mythic economic growth, and Ethiopia's human rights practices -- to name but a few -- genuinely reflect the GoE's entrenchment in the country's current trajectory which is increasingly at

odds with U.S. interests and values in both the political and economic realms. As such, we continue to advocate for senior level bilateral meetings as soon as the AF Assistant Secretary is in place. They make sense and would help ease Ethiopia's anxieties and underscore our concerns as well as reinforce our support for the relationship. End Comment.  
YAMAMOTO